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ABSTRACT

To evaluate current and possible future activities of the Education Commission of the States concerning the educational needs of cultural minorities, in 1980 the staff commissioned six papers to be written on the education needs of: (1) Blacks; (2) Mexican Americans; (3) Cubans; (4) Puerto Ricans; (5) Indians and Native Alaskans; and (6) Asians and Pacific Islanders. The Commission report draws implications from the papers concerning educational needs of minorities resulting from poverty, cultural differences, linguistic differences, mobility, need for parent education and parent involvement, and health problems of students. Although the authors of the papers generally limit their remarks to elementary/secondary issues, each group appears to have education needs at the postsecondary level. In essence, the papers provide a comprehensive overview from which to assess the ongoing activities of the Commission. The Commission assists states in addressing the needs of cultural minorities by technical assistance, by information/data collection, and by interpretation of state needs to federal policy makers. Specialized staff members provide in-depth assistance in the areas of school finance reform, desegregation, Indian education, and migrant education. Some activities have been undertaken in the area of bilingual education. (CM)

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SUMMARY REPORT

Working Papers
on Meeting the Education Needs
of Cultural Minorities

November 1980

Prepared for:
The Fall 1980
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U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
EDUCATION & WELFARE
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Education Commission of the States
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
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Summary Report

At the 1980 annual meeting of the Education Commission of the States, a resolution was adopted directing staff "to evaluate current and possible activities of the Commission concerning the educational needs of cultural minorities, including but not limited to Hispanics, and to report to the steering committee at its fall 1980 meeting."

To some extent, the ability of the staff to evaluate current activities of the Commission was dependent on the development of an understanding of what kinds of education needs are of greatest concern to cultural minorities at this time (summer/fall of 1980). That, in turn, led to the need to group cultural minorities into specific categories and to identify the education needs of each group as well as to determine which needs were common to more than one group.

The staff, therefore, commissioned six papers to be written on the education needs of the following groups: (1) Blacks; (2) Mexican Americans; (3) Cubans; (4) Puerto Ricans; (5) Indians and Native Alaskans; and (6) Asians and Pacific Islanders. The papers were written by individuals who are noted authorities and they were reviewed by individuals who also are recognized as experts on minority concerns.* Because of the very short period of time between the annual meeting and the fall steering committee meeting, authors and reviewers were not asked to provide extensive, documented reports, but to provide their own perspectives and understanding of the current needs that exist.

* A list of titles, authors and reviewers is attached.

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These papers, then, provide a comprehensive overview from which staff were able to assess the ongoing activities of the Commission. The implications drawn from the papers are presented, briefly, in the next few paragraphs and followed by a description of recent activities within the Commission that appear to be most relevant.

- Education needs resulting from poverty. Title I of ESEA is based on the assumption that poverty results in educational disadvantagement -- an assumption that is borne out by research. It is widely recognized that America's cultural minorities are poor and that minority populations do suffer from the effects of educational disadvantagement.

There have been three different kinds of responses. On the one hand, compensatory education has evolved as a programmatic response to meeting the needs of poor children. Second, the recognition that poor children tend to attend schools where education resources are limited has resulted in extensive efforts to reform state school finance systems. As a result, greater equity has been achieved in recent years in the financing of education which, in turn, has helped provide for a more equal educational opportunity for disadvantaged students.

In the case of Black students, a third strategy has been that of school desegregation. Although not a panacea in itself, even when successfully implemented, school desegregation can also lead to a greater equality of educational opportunity.

- Education needs resulting from cultural differences. The primary impact of being culturally "different" is a psychological one and one that impacts education achievement in different ways. For example, a student who has recently arrived from Vietnam experiences a kind of "culture shock" that is different from the more subtle response of the U.S. born minority child to the Anglo classroom. Both, however, have difficulty making a transfer from the ideas and values of their parents to those that are taken for granted by Anglo Americans in the classroom setting.

Some examples are provided in the papers that help to illustrate the problem. Indochinese children are likely to have been encouraged to learn by rote memory and may find it difficult to develop and apply analytic skills in the classroom setting. Asian younsters may find it difficult to express their own opinions when asked to do so by the classroom teacher since that might be viewed, by their parents, as disrespectful. Newly arriving students from Cuba (the Marielese "entrants"), show a range of behavior patterns that are indeed unusual in American schools as a result of their upbringing in a communist country.

There appear to be two kinds of responses available to help minority students make a better adjustment to the school setting. For the past

twenty years, Cuban students entering the Dade County Public Schools have found counseling services available, provided by adults (many of them from Cuba) who are highly qualified to help students understand the differences between the culture they have grown up in and the one they were entering -- and to learn to benefit from the best that both cultures have to offer. Bicultural education, where it exists, is designed to do the same thing, but also, to help the Anglo child gain a greater understanding and appreciation of cultures other than his or her own.

• Eduction needs resulting from linguistic differences. The recent efforts of the Office for Civil Rights to promulgate regulations for national origin minority students who are limited English proficient has been highly instrumental in attracting the attention of educators to this particular set of needs. In each of the six groups, including Blacks, a significant number of students are adversely affected by language barriers that impede the learning process.

There are wide variations. Some students may not speak English at all while others may be limited English proficient or may speak a dialect of some kind ("Black English," Haitian, etc.). Newly arriving immigrants have a different set of education needs than do U.S. born children just entering school, even though they may both speak Spanish. While there is some uncertainty about when a student is no longer in need of special help to improve English proficiency, it is widely recognized that every student must be able to understand, speak, read and write standard English in order to fully realize his or her educational and employment opportunities.

The primary response to this need has been bilingual education, often combined with English-as-a-Second-Language, tutoring or other specialized programs designed to help students become fluent in English. Relatively new, nationwide, and largely a response to court decisions (particularly the U.S. Supreme Court decision in Lau v Nichols, 1974), these programs provide special services for only a small percentage of the students who might be expected to benefit from them.

Further, there are wide variations in the quality and comprehensiveness of programs, a fact that reflects, at least in part, the greater difficulties that some language groups present in terms of developing curriculum materials and recruiting qualified bilingual teachers. Programs are also not typically available for students who speak dialects or other variations of English, even though many such students are limited in English proficiency.

• Education needs related to high rates of mobility. Many minority students are highly mobile, moving between the mainland and Puerto Rico or Mexico, or, as newly arriving immigrants, moving from one location to another in search of better jobs, a better climate or, perhaps, relatives. Migrant workers, as a part of the migrant stream for approximately six months of every year, have many cultural minorities among them (e.g., Hispanics, Indians).

The only mechanism to date that has been establishes to meet the education needs of mobile students is the Migrant Student Record Transfer System

(MSRTS). Headquartered in Arkansas, the MSRTS allows educators to access student information on migrant children through computer terminals. No similar mechanism in in place for newly arriving immigrants or for students who travel back and forth from Puerto Rico or Mexico (unless they are the children of migrant workers), to provide a degree of continuity in their education program.

- The need for parent education and parent involvement. One final commonality is the heavy emphasis placed by authors on the need for parent education and involvement. Although most heavily emphasized by Indian parents and tribal leaders, this approach appears also to be an important means of improving the education of Black children (since research has shown that Black parents have high aspirations for their children in terms of education attainment).

Interestingly, parent education and involvement was viewed by almost all authors as an important means of improving education opportunity. Even in the case of refugee families, who typically find it difficult to participate in education planning or decision making due to cultural and linguistic barriers, there is nonetheless an interest in helping their children learn at home -- an interest that was viewed as extremely valuable to the learning process.

In many cases, parent education was viewed as beneficial, educationally, to parents as well as students, while parent involvement was viewed as essential to formulating education programs that were accepting of and responsive to different cultural groups.

Although the authors of these papers generally limited their remarks to elementary/secondary issues, it should also be noted that each group appears to have some education needs at the postsecondary level as well. Most predominant is the fact that -- as a result of poverty, language barriers and disadvantagement -- only a small percentage of minorities enter postsecondary institutions and many of these do not complete the requirements for a degree.

As a result, many professions, for all practical purposes, are closed to minorities, including the teaching profession. Not only are important kinds of "role models" largely missing in the lives of minority children, the adverse effects of stereotyping continue to be reinforced in a continuing, repetitive way.

Finally, although also not frequently mentioned by the authors of papers,

health problems appear, by implication, to be a matter of concern on the part of educators. It is well known that poor nutrition and inadequate health care are not uncommon in low-income families but, in addition, both immigrant and migrant children are affected by serious health problems and a high incidence of handicapping conditions.

Newly arriving Cuban students, for example, have been raised in an economy that is characterized by food shortages of different kinds and food rationing; Indochinese children, particularly those from war zones, are often affected by serious health and handicapping conditions. Many migrant children have severe health problems and an unusally high incidence of accidents that result in one or more handicapping conditions. For educators, these problems can, of course, seriously complicate their efforts to effectively address the student's special education needs.

These then, appear to constitute the most fundamental needs of cultural minority groups with respect to education. The very brief, generalized description of the strategies and programs that have come into existence to address these needs provide a framework for the following discussion of ECS activities.

* * * *

The activities of the Commission range from the collection of policy relevant data and information to highly focused technical assistance efforts. There is often, also, a component of ECS activities that provides for information dissemination referral services and convening functions. Most activities of the Commission represent some combination of the above. With respect to addressing the needs of cultural minorities, the activities of the Commission

are grouped below in accordance with their level of specificity -- beginning with more policy oriented activities and ending with specific forms of technical assistance.

(1) Information/Data Collection. The largest information/data collection activity within ECS is the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which provides measures of student performance in different subject areas on a regular, continuing basis. The data collected by National Assessment, for example, tells policy makers if there has been a change in student performance in such areas as science, math, reading, writing, etc., over a five-year period -- by age level, geographic region, etc. Minority populations are also assessed so that comparisons with the population as a whole can be made.

Because of its methodology and because it measures education attainment over time, National Assessment data is highly relevant to the development of state and national education policy. In his recent campaign, for example, President Carter referred to National Assessment data in an interview, stating:

> ...Our education system is not adequately reaching those in our society who historically have been underserved -- disadvantaged, handicapped, Indian, English-limited and minority students.
>
> The National Assessment of Educational Progress provides us with a monitoring process which has helped us to identify just how serious our problem is in promoting equal educational opportunity." (Instructor, October 1980, p. 39).

National Assessment findings also provide some indication that compensatory education programs, and other related efforts, may be beginning to produce positive results.

Another noteworthy data collection activity is the ongoing effort of ECS' Education Finance Center to monitor state funding for both compensatory educa-

tion and bilingual education. That information, coupled with data on federal expenditures, provides an understanding of funding levels and mechanisms, number of students served, per-pupil expenditures and other policy relevant data.

The Department of Research and Information also compiles information on the education needs of minority groups and makes that information available to policy makers as requested. In the many areas where ECS staff are not available to provide direct assistance, the Department provides referral services.

Finally, numerous reports and publications of the Commission directly address the education needs of cultural minorities. Articles in COMPACT magazine typically provide succinct, up-to-date information on issues of importance to state officials and many of these have addressed minority concerns. Reports have been made available on the implications of the Bakke case (i.e., on the access of minority students to postsecondary institutions). There have been many others, as well, that have directly or indirectly dealt with the needs of different minority groups.

(2) Federal Relations. One of the functions of ECS is to interpret state needs and concerns to national policy makers and to influence federal policies in ways that lead to improved federal/state relations. In this area. ECS has attempted, and had some success, in several areas.

In addition to supporting increased appropriations for Title I of ESEA, ECS has also sought improvements in the funding formula that would result in higher levels of funding for districts with concentrations of low-income students. ECS has also urged that grants be made available to states to recognize state efforts to provide funding for compensatory education programs.

ECS has supported increased funding for the Emergency School Aid Act, to help districts devise more responsive solutions to desegregation problems. This

program helps encourage leadership at the district level, reducing the role of the courts in planning desegregation strategies. The Commission has also sought ways of encouraging a more comprehensive approach to addressing minority issues without lessening the emphasis on meeting the specialized needs of individual minority groups. The emphasis has been on identifying more effective and streamlined approaches to categorical funding that are responsive to state and local initiatives and needs.

Finally, ECS has recently contributed to the development of regulations designed to implement the provisions of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 with respect to national origin minorities with limited English proficiency. The Commission prepared an analysis of the proposed regulations based on the results of: (1) a survey completed by ECS Commissioners; and (2) meetings of state officials at which the provisions of the regulations were discussed. In addition, ECS staff members attended the six hearings conducted throughout the United States on the proposed regulations.

(3) Technical Assistance. With respect to technical assistance, or more directly focused activities, the following should be noted:

- The Education Finance Center. As discussed in the preceding section, school finance reform is a major strategy for improving educational opportunity for low-income students. The Finance Center provides direct, indepth technical assistance to the states that have undertaken school finance reform efforts. Many of the Center's studies have specifically assessed the impact that alternative school finance methods might have on minority populations.

It should be noted that the Finance Center, in cooperation with the National Conference of State Legislatures, has completed a twelve-month study of the distribution of funds among all schools operated by the Bureau of Indian

Affairs. In addition, the study created a "cost of education" index for each school and developed a computer-based simulation program that enabled policy makers to review the costs and impacts of alternative funding formulas. As a result, a new formula has been adopted by BIA.

- The Law and Education Center. The Law and Education Center is concerned with the provision of "preventive law" assistance to states, helping policy makers assess the legal implications of new policy initiatives. The Center has been particularly active in the area of minimum competency testing, helping state officials anticipate the impact that new proposals might have on minority populations. In general, much of the Center's activities are focused on helping states anticipate and respond to the needs of minority populations in their formal policy actions so that, where possible, intervention by the courts can be avoided.

- The Commission has three projects that are directly concerned with providing assistance to the states with respect to minority needs. They are concerned with Indian education, Desegregation strategies and migrant education. Working closely with target states, these projects have helped states define policies and develop more comprehensive approaches to meeting the education needs of minority students.

Like most specialized ECS projects, these three projects have provided technical assistance, information and referral services, and have developed series of specific, policy-oriented reports. They have also acted as catalysts and convening agents in individual states, helping to bring together policy makers, professional and lay citizens, around issues of common concern.

Unlike the activities mentioned above, which are largely ongoing activities, the specialized projects are short-term activities. While the migrant

education project has expanded its efforts, with state-contributed Title I ESEA funds, both the Indian education and desegregation projects have recently had to reduce the scope of their activities due to funding cutbacks. Thus, ECS capabilities in all three areas have changed recently.

o ECS has conducted seminars of various kinds that also have provided direct, specialized assistance to states. Seminars on the Bakke case are an example, as are the Advanced Leadership Program Seminars (ALPS), jointly conducted with the National Conference of State Legislatures, for state legislators.

o Finally, the Commission will be providing assistance to American Samoa in developing an assessment program. Funding is also being sought to provide, via teleconferences, technical assistance to states and territories that are remote from the mainland states (e.g., Hawaii, Alaska, American Samoa, Guam, the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico). If this activity can be undertaken, an opportunity will be available to more effectively address the needs of many Asian and Pacific Island students and, also, many Spanish-speaking students.

* * * *

In sum, the Commission has assisted states in addressing the needs of cultural minorities. Its activities have ranged from technical assistance to information/data collection and have involved working closely with both state and federal officials on specific issues. Specialized staff members have been retained to provide indepth assistance in the areas of school finance reform, desegregation, Indian education and migrant education. No specialized project staff, however, have been available with expertise in the area of bilingual education although some activities have been undertaken in that area.

It should also be noted that the Commission's activities in this area have not been coordinated. While many staff members have been involved in activities directly related to meeting the education needs of cultural minorities, they have tended to work independently and there has been no overall strategy within the Commission designed to assure that the activities undertaken were mutually supportive. Similarly, no planning has taken place to determine what new directions should be undertaken.

In the coming months, staff members working with concerned Commissioners, will develop a set of recommendations for future possible activities, as directed by the resolution enacted at the 1980 annual meeting. The recommendations will be completed in time for review and consideration by the ECS policy committee prior to the 1981 spring steering committee meeting. Commissioners who would like to participate in formulating those recommendations are cordially invited to contact either Roy Forbes or Carol Andersen of the ECS staff.